19: Sneath--1 U-4 (no date) 1954 All Southeast Asia All

/Article 23/

Anthropological Blood-Grouping in South-East Asia

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143
162

Summary of a communication to the Institute, 4 February, 1954

Four aboriginal tribes in Malaya and Borneo were studied in association with Dr. I. Polunin of the University of Malaya, as part of the programme of anthropological blood-grouping organized by Dr. A. E. Mourant. Blood samples were collected from the settlements and were tested for the ABO, MNS, Rhesus, P, Lutheran, Kell and Duffy groups and for the sickle-cell trait. Specimens of saliva were also tested for ABH secretion. The more important results are summarized in the table (page 2), in which the salient blood-group features of the main racial types of man are noted for comparison. About 100 samples from each tribe were tested.

The Negritos of Malaya.

The high incidence of the Rhesus gene Ro (cDe) supports the belief that the Negritos and Africans are descended from a common stock. The sickle-cell trait was absent, but there is some doubt whether this trait is a safe criterion of African ancestry. A more serious objection to an African origin for the Negritos is the low frequency of Ro and the absence of the trait in the Andaman Negritos, recently reported by Lehmann and Ikin (personal communication).

The Malayan Senoi.

The racial affinities of the Senoi have been much discussed, and some have suggested that they are related to the Veddas or to the Australoids. The blood groups of the Senoi are quite different from those of the Australian aborigines; the latter lack the genes B and S and have low M, while the Senoi possess considerable amounts of all three. There are few data on Veddoid blood groups. The groups of the Senoi are similar to those of Mongoloids, and this strongly supports the theory that the Senoi are closer to the Mongoloids

19: Sneath--2 U-4, (no date) 1954 ALl Southeast Asia ALl

TABLE I. RACIAL FREQUENCIES OF BLOOD-GROUP GENES AND FREQUENCIES IN FOUR ABORIGINAL TRIBES OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA

System	Gene	Caucasoids	Australoids	Negroids	Mongoloids	Negritos	Senoi	Aboriginal Malays	Land Dayaks
ABO	A	High (0.3)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	0.15	0.05	0.12	0.21
	B	Low	ABSENT	High (0.3)	High*	0.09	0.24	0.20	0.31
	A_2	Moderate	Absent	High (0.0[illegible])	Absent	0	0	0	0
MNS	N	Moderate	HIGH (0.9)	Moderate	Low	0.27	0.28	0.21	0.33
	S	HIGH (0.3)	ABSENT	Moderate	Low	0.14	0.09	0.03	0.01
Rh	r (cde)	HIGH (0.4)	Absent	Moderate	Absent	0	0	0	0
	Ro (cDe)	Low	Moderate	HIGH (0.[illegible])	Low	0.27	0.01	0.01	0.07
	R_1 (CDe)	Moderate	Moderate	LOW	HIGH (0.8)	0.63	0.93	0.94	0.85
	R_2 (cDE)	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate ‡	0.10	0.07	0.04	0.08
Duffy	Fy^a	Moderate	High (0.9)	Low	High	0.5		0.7	
Sickle-cell trait		Absent	Absent	High†	Absent	Absent		Absent	

* Absent in America

† Also in Veddoids

‡ High in America (0.4)

The figures in parentheses after "High" show the average gene frequency of the gene in that race which possesses the highest frequency.

143 162

• 143
162

than to any other race.

The Aboriginal Malays.

The blood groups confirm that these people are Mongoloids, being similar to those of most peoples of Malaysia.

The Land Dayaks of Borneo.

The blood groups of the Land Dayaks were found to be of the Malaysian type.

Variability in Blood Groups of Settlements.

Great variation was found in blood groups between settlements of the same tribe. It was noted in all four peoples, and is presumably due to settlement endogamy (known to be common in Land Dayaks and Aboriginal Malays). Although this lessens the value of blood-grouping as a means of tracing racial ancestry, it may throw light on the way in which races arise: for instance, the suggestion that the American Indians lack blood group B because they are descended from a few small tribes who, by chance, lacked the gene is supported by examples of the virtual absence of common genes in some settlements which we studied.

The variability is thought to be due largely to genetic drift, though doubtless other factors are also responsible. The possibility of such variation, usually ignored in blood-group work, should always be considered in surveys of this area (see Polunin, Man, 1952, 104).

A full account of this work is to be published.